

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 7851

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PDEV, NI, SHUM
SUBJECT: THE BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY

REF: LAGOS 7365

1. POLITICAL DISCUSSION IS INCREASINGLY
CENTERING ON THE BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY
AND THE QUESTION OF WHEN IT WILL BE LIFTED WITH
FMG OFFICIALS ISSUING STERN WARNINGS THAT THE
BAN IS STILL IN EFFECT WHILE THE PRESS AND
ASPIRING POLITICIANS CALL FOR ITS REMOVAL.
2. THE FMG'S POSITION THAT THE BAN IS STILL
IN EFFECT AND MUST NOT BE CONTRAVENED WAS REITERATED
BY CHIEF OF STAFF SHEHU YAR'ADUA IN A SPEECH
ON JUNE 24 IN ILORIN. WHILE ISSUING A WARNING
AGAINST POLITICIANS WHO ARE PUBLICLY DISCUSSING
THEIR POLITICAL PLANS, YAR' ADUA ADDED THAT THE
FMG IS "IRREVOCABLY COMMITTED TO A PEACEFUL HAND-OVER
TO A POPULARLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT." IN SIMILAR
TONES, VARIOUS STATE GOVERNMENT AND POLICE
OFFICIALS HAVE ISSUED WARNINGS DURING THE PAST
TWO WEEKS, APPARENTLY AIMED AT THE INCREASING
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NUMBER AND SIZE OF "PRIVATE" POLITICAL MEETINGS
BEING HELD IN THE COUNTRY.

3. AT THE SAME TIME, POLITICIANS AND
THE PRESS ARE CONTINUING TO URGE THAT THE BAN ON
POLITICS BE LIFTED BEFORE THE OCTOBER 1 TARGET
DATE. IN A PRESS STATEMTN ISSUED OVER THE

WEEKEND, IBO CONSTUENT ASSEMBLY LEADER SAM MBAKWE CALLED ON THE FMG TO ACT NOW. ACCORDING TO MBAKWE, "IF ELECTIONS INTO THE LEGISLATIVE HOUSES WOULD BEGIN EARLY IN MARCH AS IS BEING SPECULATED, IT IS THEREFORE A MATTER OF GREAT NATIONAL URGENCY THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD LIFT THE BAN ON POLITICAL PARTIES WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY."

4. A SIMILAR POSITION WAS TAKEN IN A JUNE 26 NEW NIGERIAN (NN) EDITORIAL WHICH ASKED: "WHY CONTINUE THE FARCE? TO ALLOW THE PRESENT SQUALID UNDERGROUND MANUVERINGS TO CONTINUE CAN ONLY HARDEN CERTAIN ATTITUDES THAT CAN MAKE THE RETURN OF NORMAL POLITICAL PROCESSES THAT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT QUITE UNNECESSARILY. IN LIFTING THE BAN NOW, POLITICAL PARTY FORMATIONS CAN BENEFIT FROM AN EARLY START AND MAKE ADEQUATE PREPARATIONS IN PRESENTING THE COUNTRY WITH THEIR PROGRAMS AND AFFILIATIONS SO THAT THE ELECTORATE CAN BE SAVED FROM ARBITRARINESS AND CONFUSION WHICH A DELAYED RETURN CAN BRING. AFTER ALL, IT WILL SAVE US A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF HEADACHE IF WE CAN SEPARATE THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF EARLY IN THE GAME."

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5. COMMENT: AS WE REPORTED REFTTEL, THE STANDARD WISDOM HERE IS THAT THE BAN ON POLITICS WILL BE LIFTED AT THE END OF JULY, PROBABLY ON JULY 29, THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE ANTI GOWON COUP. NEVERTHELESS, A SOURCE CLOSE TO MEA COMMISSIONER GARBA TOLD US THAT THE SMC HAS NOT YET MET TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION, MUCH LESS DECIDED TO MOVE UP THE OCTOBER 1 DATE. HOWEVER, WE CAN EXPECT THE PRESSURE TO INCREASE. AS THE NN SAID, "(THE POLITICIANS ARE STRAINING AT THE LEASH."

WYMAN

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NNN

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